The Reptilia cannot, it must be acknowledged, offer such ostensible sources of amusement or interest as these : but to the philosophical student of Nature,—to him who seeks in his investigations for something beyond the mere gratification of the eye and ear, or the amusement to be derived from watching the changes of an insect, or the nidification of a bird,—to him, in short, who, in the expanded and almost boundless view of Nature which lies before him, endeavours to trace something of the great plan on which this world of life has been organized, and to ascertain the very principles of that mighty and harmonious system, of which every variety of form, and every grade of organization constitutes an essential part,—no class of beings, however forbidding their outward appearance may be, or with whatever attributes of dread and disgust superstition may have invested them, can be otherwise than interesting, and deserving the most careful and profound investigation.

It is obvious that in proportion to the extent of our acquaintance, not only with those types of form which indicate the centres of the different groups, but with the nicer gradations of structure which form the passage from one group to another, or the links by which they are associated, will be our means of advancing in the pursuit of this most important and interesting object, to which the anxious attention of every true naturalist has been directed, from Aristotle downwards to MacLeay. It is not that every species of a group—especially of some of the most extensive, and which contain numerous species of nearly the same form,—can be viewed as equally important: the decision, for instance, of every doubtful species of the Colubridæ would be but a trifling and unimportant addition to our knowledge, with respect to the great object to which I have alluded; yet how often does it happen that an individual which, from superficial examination perhaps, or from the want of comparison, had been considered as isolated and bearing no near or important relation to any other form, proves, by the discovery of other intermediate species, or by further investigation of its own characters, to be the essential link in some important chain of affinity, or the analogical key to some corresponding form in another group. The distinct and certain settlement of disputed synonymy, too, cannot be considered as a very important object of the labours of the naturalist; yet even this, to an orderly and well-regulated mind, will be a source

of no small satisfaction ; whilst the results, in the elucidation of the geographical distribution of animals, and still more in ascertaining the identity or diversity of recent and fossil species, give to this more humble branch of our zoological studies, an importance which does not at first sight appertain to it.

To all these objects the writer of Monographs essentially contributes. He acts as the pioneer, removing obstacles, and clearing the ground to be afterwards occupied by the more efficient force, whose evolutions would be continually impeded and their plans disordered, but for the assistance of their laborious predecessors.

In composing a Monograph of the present Order, there is no difficulty in ascertaining its exact limits, nor danger of committing the error either of introducing an individual belonging to any approximating group, or of rejecting as doubtful any one which really appertains to this. There is in fact scarcely any group of animals which, according to our present knowledge, is so distinctly circumscribed by peculiarity of structure, as the Testudinata. The circumstance of the limbs being placed within instead of on the outside of the trunk, and the osseous union of the ribs, forming a sort of bony box, including not only the viscera but the members, are characters which at once separate them from every other known group. Whether future investigations, either in recent or especially in fossil zoology, may discover the links by which these singular animals are connected, by continuous affinity, with any of the groups from which at present they appear to be so distinctly separated, we cannot now even conjecture; but at present they certainly remain the most isolated order, not only amongst the Reptilia, but perhaps in the whole animal kingdom.

As the species which inhabit the Continent of Europe and the seas which were navigated by its ancient inhabitants, are but few, we look in vain to the Classical writers on natural subjects for any but the most vague and uncertain notices respecting them. That the four species of marine turtles were known both to the Greeks and Romans, is indeed scarcely to be doubted, as three of them are occasionally found in the Mediterranean, and the fourth, *Chelonia imbricata*, furnished their merchants with the precious tortoise-shell,—an article of luxurious decoration, which appears to have been much used in ornamenting the palaces and villas of the Roman nobles. The soft-bodied species of this